

VIEWS AND
TESTIMONIES
OF
FRIENDS

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ADDRESS
BY
ISAAC H. HILLBORN

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VIEWS AND TESTIMONIES
OF FRIENDS

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The object in inviting your presence to-night is many fold. One purpose is, that during the social hour which will be spent after our meeting, we may meet and learn to know each other better, and love each other more, that there may be a forgetfulness of self, and that we may remember more and more each other's welfare.

It is well known that the Society of Friends has not that which might be designated as a creed. While it has a well-defined faith, and an acknowledged set of principles, it has never delegated to any man, or set of men, the right to formulate in words the conceptions of truth as acknowledged by it, and to ask others to subscribe to such a formulation; but Friends have ever stood in maintenance of the truth, and have ever

been faithful in presenting their conceptions of it to the world.

As has been said, we have no written form. We have a book containing what are termed "Rules of Discipline and Advices," which have been formulated at different times, and adopted and published by the authority of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Friends. This book does not form in any manner a creed, nor does it contain dogmas, but we regard it as a printed copy of our organic law, and accept the advices therein contained as being the expression of truth from the highest body of our organization.

Friends have always stood upon the positive rather than the negative side of these testimonies. For proof of this we need only cite to you those several Queries in this organic law, which are answered by the subordinate meetings, formulated answers being sent up to the superior meetings, as representing the state of the Society, both as regards the conduct of the individual mem-

bers, and the maintenance of these testimonies by the Society at large. This is done with the object of showing that we stand as an affirmative people except as it may be in the testimonies that we bear against that which is evil.

The first question that is asked is, whether all our meetings, for worship and for discipline, are regularly held. The second one asks, "Are love and unity maintained among you?" "Are tale-bearing and detraction discouraged," and again, "Are you faithful to bear your testimony against war and all its concomitant evils? Are you clear of the manufacture, sale and use of all intoxicating beverages? Are you clear of signing applications for license to sell the same? Are you careful in the use of same as medicine? Are you careful to train those under your care in plainness of speech, behavior and apparel? Are you careful to encourage them in the frequent reverent reading of the Holy Scriptures, and do you restrain them from the

use of pernicious books, and from the corrupt conversation of the world? Do you bear a faithful testimony in favor of peace and arbitration?" You will notice that all of these are affirmative in their purpose.

It is our mission to hold up the Light that God has granted to us, and if the shining of it affects the lives of the individual members of our church, their influence will be for good.

Doctrine, when spoken of in reference to a religious organization, is the body of principles professed by that Society, which, if believed in and practiced by its members, will lead to their highest good. We have a right, then, as members of common society to inquire as to the doctrines held by the various religious organizations. We have a right to inquire if there are any set forms of belief, or any formulated expression of thought that may be accepted as the doctrines of our Society.

Some of these can be expressed very briefly:

We believe in one God, the Father of us all, and in His Omnipotence and Omnipresence, acknowledging Him to be the Source of all light, life and immortality.

We believe in the anointing power of His Holy Spirit operating in the soul of man, and in the immediate revelation of His Divine Will as resulting from its inspiration.

We believe that the fullest, richest, most complete revelation of Himself, and of His power, wisdom, and will, was made in and through the person of His son, Jesus Christ. In Him did all fullness dwell, and we have each received a measure of that fullness.

We believe in the Scriptural doctrine of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as one.

We believe that the Inner Light, or Spirit of Truth, or Grace of God, or Life of Christ within, is God's gift for

man's salvation. "That salvation is not merely an exemption from the punishment due to sin, but consists in being released from the power and dominion of evil." The primary object of the Light within is to guide man in the true way of life, and thus preserve him in harmony with his Father; but if through disobedience that harmony is destroyed, it can only be restored by man's submitting his will to the will of his Father, and being obedient to its requirements.

"The Religious Society of Friends from its rise to the present day has always maintained its belief in the authenticity and divine authority of the Holy Scriptures, referring to them for proof of its principles, and acknowledging them to be the only fit outward test of Christian doctrines. We assign to the Scriptures all the authority which they claim for themselves," and acknowledge that "every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable for

teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete and furnished completely unto every good work.”* (2 Tim. 3: 16.)

These are a few points covered by the prominent testimonies held by our Society.

Recognizing that there is but one God, we hold that He is the Source of all light, life and immortality. We know that that which is immortal must be divine; it must partake of the nature of God Himself, and so we understand that the primary object of this light within is to manifest to the individual soul a measure of that spirit and life of God. We believe that in God, the source and fountain of divinity, dwells life, power and wisdom, and that by and through the operation of this power and wisdom all

* “Summary of Christian Doctrines.” S. M. Janney.

things were made, and from this same source must ever spring all light and life, and that which we may experience as immortality. We believe most thoroughly in the inspiring power of this Holy Spirit of God, and that it has operated in the soul of man ever since his first creation.

Through the inspiring power of the Holy Spirit there is germinated in the soul a life that must be akin to God, and we regard this as a direct impartation of the very essence of His own nature. The fullness of that life dwelt in Jesus Christ, and of His fullness have each of us received, and grace for grace. The inquiring mind has a right to ask for a correct understanding as to how we are to come into the possession of this life and this truth. God is unchangeable, the same yesterday, to-day and forever; and as He imparted a measure of His own divine self to the souls of His first created beings, so He stands willing to-day to impart a measure of that divinity to the

soul of each of His children. He has created man, and made him so independent among all the orders of creation that he can decide whether this power, wisdom, light, and truth shall enter into the innermost recesses of his being or not. God has created him a responsible being, and has placed these things at his disposal; but it rests with the individual man whether he will receive this gift of God. It is recorded, and life's experience corroborates it, that the "Wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. 6: 23.) This is the open door, the channel, the medium through which that gift of God is to be transferred to the members of the human family—through the medium of this Christ, the Christ that is to bring "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men"—revealed in the individual soul by and through the agency and the activity of that Divine Spirit which Friends call the Inner Light.

With the promulgation of the thought that there are three distinct persons in the God-head we have nothing to do, believing this to lead into the mazy labyrinths of mysticism and doubt.

The primary object of this light within is to lead man aright in his pathway through the world; and if he is obedient to the monitions of duty, as revealed to him by that light, harmony will be preserved between the individual members of the human family and God. But if by disobedience that harmony is destroyed, it can only be restored by the power of the Spirit of the living God; if man's soul has been darkened by his transgressions, and he seeks to come back into close union with his Father he must accept this saving power in the manner prescribed by God. That revelation of the Father, and the revelation of His will, is only made by and through the agency of His own light, and we can never understand nor gain a knowledge of it unless it is revealed to us through the Spirit of Christ.

As He Himself declared, "No one knoweth the Son save the Father, neither doth any know the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him." It is through this agency that the revelation is made, the agency of this divine Christ in the soul.

We know we can only gain a true knowledge of the outward sun, which we regard as the fountain of all outward light and life, through the medium of its own light, as it operates through the organ of the eye; and so we understand that we can derive a true and complete knowledge of God only through the revealing power of His Holy Spirit, as it operates upon the eye of the soul, which we call the conscience. Friends have ever maintained that there is a difference between this inward light and the conscience just as there is a difference between the light that emanates from the outward sun, and the eye, which is the medium of its entrance to the human mind. The eye cannot see without the

light, as it is only the organ through which the light operates. The conscience cannot see unless it is illuminated by the light, as it is the organ through which that light finds an entrance into the inner recesses of our being. The one is for the enlightenment of man's conscious being; the other is for the fulfillment of the spiritual conditions relating to that life. The wise King of Israel declared that "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord." (Prov. 20: 27.) We all know that the candle contains all those properties which go to make the light, but it gives no light until it is lighted by something other than itself. So it is with the individual conscience; it is the organ through which the light of the Divine Father enters into the soul. It emits no light until it is touched by the power and the spirit of the living God.

Declaration was made that the fullest, richest, most complete revelation God ever made to man was made through the

person of Jesus Christ. We acknowledge this in its fullest sense. A true knowledge of it never can be attained through the agency of any words, however beautiful they may be; but there must be a living experience, and a positive possession of a measure of that Divinity, and then through its agency man will come into a true knowledge of God, and of the Divine Son that has been brought forth in his soul, which is declared by Jesus Christ to be life eternal. It must be life eternal, because it is a part of God. It has been imparted by God to the members of the human family, through the agency of His Divine Spirit; and we, as an organized Society, recognize the source of this power, the channel through which it comes, and the value of its possession.

There is no language that can portray the beauty and the strength of this life; there is no belief that can be accepted by men as being sufficient to take its place. No theory of God, no theory of Christ, should ever be allowed to take the

place of God, or of Christ. Theory is well enough, but we need the essence itself. Theology is well enough, but we need something more; religion is a life; Christianity is a life; theology is what men may think about that life, and what they may formulate into words in regard to it, but it is not the life itself. We need to be the possessors of this, to be anointed with this divine life, and our being needs to be filled with it.

We understand that God sent His be-gotten Son into the world for the express purpose of manifesting such a measure of His own divine self to His children as would stimulate them to follow that example, and to accept the doctrines which He promulgated, which, if believed in and practiced, would lead men onward and upward to the one Fountain of Life.

To know in what relation we stand to God and to Jesus Christ is a proper inquiry, and there is no better way to illustrate it to the inquiring mind than by the

proper application of the beautiful parable of the vine.

He had declared to His disciples that He stood to them as a shepherd of the flock, but we know that in that relation there could be no impartation of the life of the shepherd to the sheep. He could only care for and lead them from one pasture to another. But there was a closer relationship that existed between Him and His followers, and so, only a little while before His death, He taught them that beautiful representation contained in the Parable of the Vine. The Father is the Husbandman; the Christ, the Son, is represented as the "True Vine," and "ye are the branches." That declaration as it has come down to us through age after age, has lost nothing in its divine import or force. God is the great Husbandman of human souls to-day: Christ is the Vine, or the medium through which that divine sap is to be conducted from its source into every one of the living branches. The function of

the vine is to transmit the vitalized sap, the very essence of its own being, into its branches, and thus to the outermost leaf and twig that is connected with the vine. The sap that is in the leaf, branch, twig, limb and vine is of the same character and nature, but we know that there is not the quantity in the leaf that there is in the branch; there is not the quantity in the twig that there is in the vine, but it is of the same kind.

Jesus Christ used this parable to teach His disciples, and through them the world and all succeeding ages, that they had access to that fountain of light, life and immortality through the same agency, and they would each receive a measure of the divine sap of the kingdom adapted to the condition of the individual mind. We would hold then, that the Divinity that dwelt in Jesus Christ in its fullness was of the same character and kind as God, and it is the same character and kind that God has imparted to each one of His children. This does not

detract from the person and the power that was in Jesus Christ, but places it just where it belongs; and it is in this acceptance of His presentation of the truth that we come into the possession of the highest revelation of God that is possible for us as individual members of His Church to experience.

We acknowledge the Scriptures of truth to be just what they claim to be, a record made by inspired men of old, as they gave forth their testimony and evidence of their experience as possessors of the life. We believe that the inspiring power of God so filled their minds with a love of the truth that they followed directly in the way in which this Light pointed them. The Ten Commandments that were given by God through His chosen servant Moses, on Sinai, were based upon the very same principles as are enunciated in the Sermon on the Mount—love to God primarily, and then love to man. Jesus Christ presented it in a different manner, and the concep-

tions of men in that day, of His presentation of the truth were different from that expressed by Moses; but Moses wrote just as truthfully as did Matthew, Mark, Luke or John.

The true estimate placed upon these writings by Friends may be inferred from extracts from advices issued by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1854, viz.: “In these invaluable writings we find the only authentic record of the early history of our race, the purest strains of devotional poetry and the sublime discourses of the Son of God. Their frequent perusal was therefore especially urged upon our younger members, who were encouraged to seek for the guidance of Divine Grace, by which alone we realize in our experience the saving truths they contain.” “In these are contained the recorded experience of the righteous in former ages, the sublime precepts of the blessed Jesus, and the history of His spotless and perfect example. In every age of the Christian Church these pre-

cious writings have afforded to pious and dedicated minds instruction that promoted their spiritual progress and encouragement to press forward in the path of duty."

From Baltimore Yearly Meeting in 1863: "We have been reminded that this Yearly Meeting has, at various times, issued advices to its members, inciting them to the frequent reading of the Holy Scriptures, the authenticity of which has always been acknowledged by the Society of Friends."

We believe that the Gospel, the glad tidings that Jesus Christ brought to the world, was of that power which dwelt in Him in its fullness. We accept the definition as given by the great apostle to the Gentiles, that the Gospel of Christ is the "Power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." The power itself is distinct from the record; and so it is in regard to this Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the power of God that is able to saye men to the uttermost,

if they only have faith in it. Faith is the gift of God and comes before belief. Belief is the result of evidence.

The blind man, who by direction of the Master, went to the pool of Siloam and washed, manifested the belief that he had in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In other words he manifested a living faith in the power of God that was able to save; and when he was questioned in regard to his belief in the Son of God he asked who He was. The people asked him whether or not he believed that this was the Son of God. He answered, oh how truthfully, that he did not know whether it was the Son of God or not. He had no belief on that point; but there was one thing that he did know, "Whereas I was blind, now I see," and when the question was put to him by the Divine Master, whether he believed on the Son of God, he asked Him, "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on Him ?" Jesus said, "Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee." The faith had been mani-

fested, the evidence had been granted him, and then came the acknowledgment, "Lord, I believe." Faith is the gift of God; belief comes through the activity of that faith.

If we acknowledge that the power of this inner light, or grace of God, or the Christ, is sufficient to lead and to guide men in the true way of life, and to enable them to preserve that harmony which existed in the beginning, we must acknowledge that the same power is able to restore that harmony should it be destroyed. But notice the representation in that beautiful Parable of the Prodigal Son; there must be more than a willingness on the part of the transgressor to come back into harmony with the Father. The prodigal son declared that he knew that there was bread enough and to spare in the Father's house. He had had that evidence furnished to him because he had been born there, and was a child of that parent. That parental relationship never had been changed; so he arose, as it is

said, and went back to the Father's house, more than willing to receive the incomes of that parental love.

No better illustration can be given of the operation of this healing and saving power, than one used by a prominent speaker when he was representing to a large audience just how the soul of the sinning man and erring woman was to be cleansed. He took a glass filled with colored fluid, the specific gravity of which was less than that of clear water, and holding it up plainly to their view, he took up a glass of clear water, and began pouring it into the vessel filled with the colored liquid. At once the pure water sank to the bottom, the dark fluid flowed out from the vessel. After this purification had been partially accomplished he placed the cap on the vessel, and continued pouring the clear fluid, but no further effect was made on the contents of the vessel.

Jesus Christ taught in that first parable that He used as He sat in that float-

ing pulpit, that the seed of the kingdom was sown in every human heart. If that seed fails to root there and bear its fruit, then man is the loser. If he violates the laws of God established for his being, and wanders away from the true sheepfold, he can only come back to it by receiving in the fullest measure which his being is able to contain and comprehend that love and spirit, wisdom and power of the Father, not only like the vessel that received the fluid just for a little while, and then discarded it, but the work must be allowed to go on until there is a complete purification of the innermost parts of the vessel. It may come, as it does come sometimes, like a refiner of fire, and a fuller with soap, but that work will never be accomplished until the image of the Father is brought out in all its perfection, on the background of the human soul. Like the man who stood beside his little crucible as he was separating by that old-time method the dross from the metal; the work was never

completed until the image of the refiner was reflected from the purified metal; so the work of reconciliation, regeneration or redemption will never be accomplished until there is a complete purification in the heart of the transgressor. This can be done only by the vessel's being filled with that which is good, and so as we recognize that God is the fountain of all light, life and immortality, we gladly accept the means He has placed at our disposal, and stand as willing recipients of the income of His love, holding ourselves open to the reception of this Divine agency and power, until the whole being is filled with it, and made one with the Father, through the agency of His Divine Son, just as He declared, "I in them"—Christ in man, and God in Christ, that they may be made as one, and that the world may know that His Father did send Him.

This is just a brief exposition of a few of the prominent points accepted by the Society of Friends as the truth. If it has

started an inquiry in one honest heart how to live closer to God, and to give Him more and more of the best of life, then this effort has not been in vain. If such conceptions of truth meet the witness in your hearts, accept them, live them out as members of the great church of Christ, no matter where your names may be enrolled. Live them out in such a way that you may show that the Tree of Life has been rooted and grounded in your souls, that it has been nourished by water flowing out through the river of life which has its source in and under the throne of God. Where lives are sustained from this source, they must bear fruit like those trees represented as standing on either side of that river, and in the very midst of it—even the leaves thereof shall be for the “healing of the nations.”

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